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Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement: A Serial Mediation Model

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Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement: A Serial Mediation Model

Abstract

Purpose – Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a vital role in work and non-work outcomes. Gaps exist in the role of contextual factor (i.e., perceived organisational support; POS) and personal resource (i.e., psychological capital; PsyCap) in investigating employees’ EI. This current research draws on the cognitive-motivational-reactional theory of emotions and conservation of resources theory in examining the serial explanatory pathways between EI and work engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – Data was collected at three points of measurement from the public sector in Nigeria. We tested our serial mediation model with a sample of 528 public sector employees using PROCESS macro with a bias-corrected bootstrapping method.

Findings – The findings show that EI was positively related to work engagement. EI exerted an indirect effect on PsyCap via POS. The indirect effect of EI on work engagement was serially mediated by POS and PsyCap.

Originality – This paper addresses gaps in the literature on emotional intelligence and regulations in the changing and challenging world of work. In so doing, this paper contributes to the literature by deepening our understanding of the complex relationship between EI, POS, PsyCap, and work engagement. Theoretical and practical implications for employees’ emotional appraisal and regulations are discussed.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, work engagement, perceived organisational support, psychological capital, conservation of resources.

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

Research has shown that emotional intelligence (EI) is an important individual difference (Schutte and Loi, 2014), a characteristic of great leaders (Goleman, 2003), and accounts for leader emergence (Hong, Catano, and Liao, 2011). For example, previous studies reveal that EI of leaders is related to leadership effectiveness and outcomes such as service climate, organisational commitment, turnover intention (Hur, Van Den Berg, and Wilderom, 2011; Wong and Law, 2002), and follower job satisfaction (Miao, Humphrey, and Qian, 2016). Beyond the influence of leader EI on followers, studies have examined EI as an individual-level construct and how it affects employee self-rated workplace behaviours. For example, research shows that EI influences knowledge-sharing behaviour (Naz, Li, Nisar, and Rafiq, 2019) and job performance (Pekaar, van der Linden, Bakker, and Born, 2017). Therefore, EI has implications for individual performance-related outcomes and organisational functioning.

Several studies have explored EI and work outcomes, for example, EI, self-efficacy, organisational citizenship behaviour, and performance (O'Boyle Jr, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, and Story, 2011; Weinzimmer, Baumann, Gullifor, and Koubova, 2017) and work-family outcomes, for example, EI, work-family conflict, work-life balance, and life satisfaction (e.g., Bedi and Bedi, 2017; Mahanta, 2015). However, little is known about the EI-work engagement link, with exception to the trait dimension of EI as a predictor of work engagement (e.g., Barreiro and Treglown, 2020; Li, Pérez-Díaz, Mao, and Petrides, 2018; Morón, and Biolik-Morón, 2021). The preponderance of trait EI in the literature is problematic because it limits our understanding of the dynamism of EI and how individuals can enhance their EI at work, with recent research showing that the management of self and other emotions is valuable for organisational leaders and employees (Drigas and Papoutsis, 2019). In order to provide meaningful policy recommendations to employees and

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3 organisations, it is important to establish whether EI affects work engagement. For example,
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5 Restubog, Ocampo, and Wang (2020) argue that employees can take control of their
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7 emotions amidst the chaos, uncertainties, and other challenges in the workplace. Hence, the
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9 explanatory processes for emotional regulation and utilisation of emotional information both
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11 theoretically and empirically needs further investigation. This is important because there are
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13 dynamics in the world of work that constantly challenges employees' ability for interpersonal
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15 and intrapersonal emotional awareness, regulation, and management. Besides, there is
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17 increasing understanding that EI helps employees' work-life interface better and can
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19 influence their health and work outcomes (Yanchus, Eby, Lance, and Drollinger, 2010).
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24 In addition, the theoretical lens in which EI have been examined in past studies have
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26 been from human motivation and personality approach (e.g., social cognitive career theory;
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28 Udayar, Fiori, Thalmayer, and Rossier, 2018; self-determination theory; El-Khodary and
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30 Samara, 2019) or job-related approach (e.g., the job-demand resources theory; Levitats and
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32 Vigoda-Gadot, 2020). These approaches impede our understanding of how emotions can be
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34 monitored, regulated, and managed, with exception to the conservation of resources theory
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36 (COR; Hobfoll 1989) that explains EI as an essential resource to employees' emotional
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38 labour and outcome variables, such as job satisfaction (Wen, Huang, and Hou, 2019).
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42 In our study, we extend previous research on employee EI on workplace outcomes by
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44 exploring the relationship between EI and work engagement, the underlying processes of
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46 perceived organisational support (POS) as a contextual factor in this relationship, given that
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48 contextual factors provide an environment for employee resources to flourish (e.g.,
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50 Cooper-Thomas, Gardner, O'Driscoll, Catley, Bentley, and Trenberth, 2013). We also
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52 examine the mediating role of psychological capital (PsyCap) as an individual resource in the
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54 relationship between EI, POS, and work engagement drawing on the cognitive-motivational-
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56 reactional theory of emotions (CMR; Lazarus 1991) and integrating it with the COR theory
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(Hobfoll 1989). Therefore, the objective of our study is to examine the mediating relationship of PsyCap and perceived organisational support (POS) in the EI-work engagement link and by so doing contribute to the literature in the following ways.

First, we contribute to the EI literature by exploring the EI as an ability or skill and its relationship with work engagement, defined as a “positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind, that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker, 2002). We consider employees' ability to manage their emotions through self-awareness, emotional regulation, monitoring and interpreting theirs and other emotions, to guide their thinking and actions, as a predictor of work engagement. Individuals with high EI have high cognitive abilities (Rode, Arthaud-Day, Ramaswami, and Howes, 2017) and require knowledge of their work environment and emotional appraisal, in line with the CMR theory. In proposing EI to predict work engagement, we contribute to the EI literature by highlighting the value of EI, thus requiring employees to pay more attention to their emotions in the way they interact with colleagues and other stakeholders in the workplace.

Second, we contribute to a better understanding of emotional awareness, regulation, and management by leveraging on the CMR theory of emotions (Lazarus 1991) which mirrors those emotions are influenced largely by an individual's knowledge of the work environment, relational skills, and appraisal of emotional experiences, leading to subsequent emotions and actions. Integrating this theoretical lens with the COR theory (Hobfoll 1989), we propose that emotionally intelligent employees contribute to workplace performance outcomes through managing their emotions and that of others, which guides their thinking and actions such that the expression of positive emotions becomes the standard in the workplace.

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Third, we contribute to the literature by exploring the effects of PsyCap, an individual resource defined as “an individual’s state of development involving self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience” (Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio, 2007, p. 3), in the relationship between EI and work engagement. In so doing, we highlight psychological resources as a vital route to work engagement. Individuals with high PsyCap contribute significantly to high-performance work systems of organisations (Agarwal and Farndale, 2017) and can preserve their resources to achieve career success (Cenciotti, Alessandri, and Borgogni, 2017). This is consistent with the propositions of COR theory (Hobfoll 1989) and requires management to consider policies that support the development of employees’ PsyCap.

Last, we focus on POS as a mediating factor in the EI-work engagement link, thus deepening our understanding of POS as a contextual factor that supports employees flourishing at work (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013). Individuals who perceive that their organisations support their work are likely to be more committed to their work, with fewer withdrawal behaviours such as turnover and absenteeism (Bano, Vyas, and Gupta, 2015). We advance POS as a vital factor in influencing work engagement through testing the mediating role in the EI-work engagement link, signposting to organisations that supportive policies and programmes are critical for improving and sustaining work engagement. The remainder of this paper is divided into theory and hypotheses, method, results, discussions, theoretical implications, and practical implications. The study ends with limitations and suggestions for further studies.

Insert Figure about here

Literature Review, Theory, and Hypotheses

Emotional Intelligence

EI can be defined as the “ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; the ability to regulate emotions, motivating oneself, empathy and handling relationships” (Mayer and Salovey, 1997, p. 10). EI is broadly conceptualised from two approaches; a trait (trait emotional self-efficacy) and an ability (cognitive-emotional ability; Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade, 2008; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Both approaches are complementary (e.g., Petrides, 2011; Liu, Wang, and Lü, 2013).

However, assessment based on both approaches do not highly correlate with each other, suggesting that they are measuring different things (Brackett and Mayer, 2003). Furthermore, the trait dimension of EI seems to dismiss the emotions in EI while the ability dimension focuses on the emotions in the EI and how individuals can improve their emotional awareness and regulations (Caruso, 2008). From this understanding and consistent with arguments that EI is malleable (Goleman, 1995; Restubog *et al.*, 2020), we approach EI as an ability. EI is described as “a set of interrelated abilities possessed by individuals to deal with emotions (Wong and Law, 2002, p. 13). EI can further be conceptualised as a type of social intelligence that involves the ability of an individual to monitor the emotions of others and oneself and, decipher between them and use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions (Salovey and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Salovey, 1993). In the context of the workplace, EI is a set of skills that help individuals regulate their emotions, and others and plan and achieve tasks (Salovey and Meyer, 1990). Four important skills of EI to be examined includes, first, the perception and appraisal of emotions (e.g., learning about facial expressions). Second, assimilating basic emotional experiences into real-life scenarios (e.g., weighing emotions and thoughts). Third, understanding, interpreting, and reasoning about emotions (e.g., interpreting

happiness, fear, anger, and shame). Last, the management and regulation of emotions in oneself and others, for example, knowing how to calm down after feeling angry about a situation or de-escalating a tense situation at work (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sternberg, 2000). EI, therefore, is the ability of an individual to recognise emotions, interpret them, apply them to situations, and solve problems (Mayer *et al.*, 2000; Salovey and Meyer, 1990).

Work Engagement

Work engagement is one of the most popular outcomes in occupational health psychology (Lesener, Gussy, Jochmann, and Wolter, 2020). It is defined as a positive state of the total investment of employees into a role as comprised of vigour, dedication, and absorption (e.g., Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Vigour refers to a high level of energy, dedication is characterised by strong enthusiasm at work while absorption is full concentration and absorbed into one's role (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). Engaged employees are usually full of energy (vigour), actively involved in their work roles (dedication) and happily concentrate or interested in the activities of the work (absorption; Bakker and Schaufeli, 2015). For this study, we treat work engagement as a unidimensional construct, to measure the overall investment of employees in their work roles. Work engagement is also conceptualised as an affective state of occupational health (Lesener *et al.*, 2020), facilitated by job resources (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris, 2008) and predicted by personal resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008), e.g., the big 5 personality traits (high openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and low neuroticism; Akhtar, Boustani, Tsivrikos, and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015). Employees who are positively engaged are aware of their work roles and are likely to exhibit service-oriented performance (Luu, 2019). Also, they are more productive, creative, and more willing to take on extra roles for their organisations (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008).

1 2 3 EI and work engagement 4

5 We explain the relationship between EI and work engagement using the CMR theory
6 of emotions (Lazarus, 1991). This theory is useful in predicting the emotions of individuals
7 concerning their (work) environment. It explains three aspects of emotions, namely, cognitive
8 (relating to an individual's knowledge and evaluation of what is happening in an
9 environment) relational (emotions relating to individuals and their environment that can
10 change over time), and motivational (emotions relating to the status of one's goals). This
11 theory proposes that the motivation of an individual's goal or investment into a role (e.g.,
12 work engagement) will be affected by the environment (i.e., perceived organisational
13 support), cognitive appraisal of the environment, and subsequent emotions (Lazarus, 1991,
14 2000). Linking this theory to work engagement, individuals with emotional management,
15 self-motivation, and emotional regulation experience higher levels of engagement (Barreiro
16 and Treglown, 2020). To put this differently, how an individual interprets emotions and
17 applies self-management in dealing with their emotions and that of others are vital skills and
18 resources that facilitate work engagement experiences (Barreiro and Treglown, 2020).
19 Drawing on this theory, we argue that an individual's emotions (emotional management and
20 regulation) will lead to positive work engagement experiences. In other words, the ability of
21 an individual to respond positively to his/her emotions will lead to higher work engagement.
22 The reason why EI will lead to higher work engagement is the embedded in the emotional
23 component of work engagement, such that work activities are sustained by the emotional
24 experience (ability to manage one's emotions and that of others) which becomes a source of
25 energy to achieve work tasks (Green Jr, Finkel, Fitzsimons, and Gino, 2017). When
26 employees exercise emotional regulation in the face of emotional experience at work, it
27 serves as energizing fuel for positive work behaviour (Elfenbein, 2007). EI has been useful in
28 achieving positive work outcomes (e.g., work engagement) in emotional experiences at work
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such as conflict management (Aqqad, Obeidat, Tarhini, and Masa'deh, 2019), organisational change (Klarner, By, and Diefenbach, 2011), business negotiations (Sharma, Bottom, and Elfenbein, 2013) and to achieve a positive emotional climate (Elfenbein, Der Foo, White, Tan, and Aik, 2007). Research shows that ability EI can be developed over time to regulate oneself and that of others in the face of challenging times and experiences, and this increases social work tasks (e.g., engagement, collaboration, cooperation, decision making, and dealing with stress; Morrison, 2007). Research also shows that EI has positive effects on employees' work engagement of civil servants in terms of social responsibility towards the social community, engagement towards the organisation, and organisational citizenship behaviour towards individuals (Levitats and Vigoda-Gadot, 2020). We draw from theory and past research to argue that ability EI will influence work engagement and hypothesise as follows:

Hypothesis 1: EI is positively related to work engagement.

PsyCap mediating EI and work engagement

PsyCap is conceptualised as an “individual’s positive psychological state of development and is characterized by (1) having self-confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering towards goals and, when necessary, redirecting path to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success” (Luthans *et al.*, 2007, p. 3). This individual resource is open to development and critical for challenging times at work as well as combating workplace stressors (e.g., Avey Luthans, and Jensen, 2009). COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) explains how individuals respond to positive or negative situations, the process of emotion regulation, and coping processes relating to job demands or job resources. This theory proposes that individuals are motivated to acquire and preserve the resources (anything people value) they already have. In other

words, resources gained (e.g., organisational support) will help to achieve better workplace outcomes while the loss of resources will cause strain and drained emotions (Hobfoll, 1989).

This theory is useful for explaining wellbeing-related constructs, e.g., burnout and work engagement (Alarcon, Edwards, and Menke, 2011). For example, optimism, efficacy, and hope (positive capacities) are resources that individuals can draw from, which in turn, influences one's emotions and work outcomes, such as well-being and work engagement (Alessandri, Consiglio, Luthans, and Borgogni, 2018; Siu, 2013). Drawing on this theory, we argue that PsyCap is a vital personal resource to increase work engagement levels in the face of job demands, especially in challenging times. To put it differently, individuals require high PsyCap to be able to cope with challenging tasks and apply appropriate emotional regulations. That is, the positive effect of EI on work engagement is dependent on individual PsyCap. The reason why PsyCap can mediate the relationship between EI, and work engagement is that PsyCap makes positive attribution from an emotional experience, which helps an individual to interpret emotions (self and others) to guide the subsequent behaviour into positive actions. This argument is based on the premise that individuals with higher PsyCap draw on their psychological strength to counter obstacles at work (Avey *et al.* 2008), and perseveres towards a goal, to achieve both in-role and extra-role performance (Gooty, 2009). Research shows that PsyCap is associated with attitudes, behaviours, and job performance (e.g., Alessandri *et al.*, 2018; Choi, Noe, and Cho, 2019). For example, a recent study shows that PsyCap had an indirect effect on the job performance of employees through informal learning (Choi, *et al.*, 2019). We expect PsyCap to mediate the relationship between EI and work engagement based on research evidence that individuals that are high in PsyCap have more capital to pursue goals (Newman *et al.*, 2014), proactively plan for alternative ways to get the task achieved, persevere in the face of daunting challenges (Choi, *et al.*, 2019)

and achieve high performance (Agarwal and Farndale, 2017). Based on the preceding, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 2: PsyCap mediates the positive effect of EI on work engagement.

POS, PsyCap, and work engagement

According to CMR theory (Lazarus, 1991), individuals appraise their emotions in relation to the environment (e.g., organisational support) and motivation (i.e goals) and this informs their subsequent emotions or work-related attitude and behaviours. Drawing on this theory, we argue that POS will mediate the relationship between EI and PsyCap. POS is the belief by employees that the organisation values their contribution, supports their social and emotional well-being, and helps them in the discharge of their work (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). We expect POS to inform the cognition of employees about their emotions in line with the proposition of CMR theory.

Research supports the relationship between POS and PsyCap, such that a supportive work environment (colleagues and supervisors) will increase individuals' PsyCap (e.g., Kिरrane, Lennon, O'Connor, and Fu, 2017). A previous study shows that POS mediates the relationship between perceived situational factors (procedural justice, distributive justice, communication satisfaction with supervisor, and labour-management relationship climate) and organisational commitment, such that POS fully mediated the relationship (Moideenkutty, Blau, Kumar, and Nalakath, 2001). Similarly, there is evidence to show that subordinates' POS mediated the relationship between relationship exchange and organisational identification (Sluss, Klimchak, and Holmes, 2008). Consequently, there is a reason to believe that POS will mediate the relationship between EI and work PsyCap. The reason to believe that POS will mediate the EI-PsyCap link is that when employees perceive that their organisational is highly supportive to them, it enhances their PsyCap (Wong, Wong, and Ngo, 2012). POS is a social-emotional resource that increases employee's hope and trust

in their organisation (Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Wong et al. 2012), which in turn, is likely to increase work engagement. Drawing on theory and past research, we expect POS to mediate the relationship between EI and PsyCap. This is based on the premise that POS will inform the employees' cognition about a supportive work environment, and this will, in turn, stimulate higher PsyCap and positive emotions towards better collaboration, and engagement with their colleagues, thereby leading to higher work engagement. We, therefore, hypothesise as follows:

Hypothesis 3: POS mediates the relationship between EI and PsyCap.

Hypothesis 4: POS and PsyCap are mediating paths in the relationship between EI and work engagement.

Method

Sampling and procedure

We draw our sample from a large public sector organisation in Nigeria. The organisation is a Federal Government Agency that deals with tax issues on a day-to-day basis with the public. Our study employed self-reported data, however, we followed the traditions of George and Pandey (2017), where they argued that self-reported data can be employed under the following conditions. (1) When an individual perception and belief is being studied- which is the focus of our study, for example, perceived organisational support (2) when other sources are not readily available, (3) if potential common method bias (CMB) in the data can be spotted employing one-factor test (4) if the variables in question have not been known to be CMB sensitive.

For our data, we controlled for CMB to establish if it is a potential issue by following the traditions of Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson (2012) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012). Both procedural and statistical approaches were employed. First, our study included only prior-validated measures. Second, the participants' information sheet

described the purpose of the study and assured the participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Ethical approval was sought and obtained for the research. We employed a convenience sampling technique to elicit information from the respondents' and gifts vouchers of NGN1,500 (the equivalent of £2.50) was offered to each respondent as incentives to take part in the study.

Third, we employed three points of measurements between the study latent variables. At point 1, questions on the demographic information of participants (e.g, age, gender, and experience) and EI were asked. Two months later (point 2) we measured work engagement. Two months later (point 3) we measured PsyCap and POS. To match the responses in the three points of measurements, participants were assigned unique code numbers and were requested to provide the code numbers in their responses across the three waves. Out of 1200 sampled employees, 920 responses were received at point 1, yielding a response rate of 76.7 percent. At point 2, 680 responses were received out of the 920 participants, representing 73.9 percent, while 559 responses were received at point 3 (representing 82 percent of point 2 and 46.5 percent of sampled respondents). After matching the data from the three points of measurement, 528 responses were deemed usable for our study. Finally, we employed Harman's single-factor test and compared the result with the proposed model. The result revealed that a single factor accounted for 18.33% of variance which is below the threshold of 50%. This implies that CMB was not found to be a potential threat to our data.

Measurement

EI

We measured EI using 16-items EI scale (Wong & Law, 2002) with four sub-dimensions (self-emotional appraisal, other emotional appraisals, regulation of emotions in oneself, and use of emotion). Sample of the items are "I have a good understanding of my own emotions" and "I am a good observer of others' emotions". For each of these statements,

participants responded on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree. The scale is shown to have a good internal consistency of 0.82 (Wong & Law, 2002).

POS

We measured POS using 6-item scale by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986). Participants responded to the items on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 Strongly Agree. Sample items includes “my organisation cares about my opinion” and “my organisation shows concern for me”, with an internal consistency of .95.

PsyCap

PsyCap was measured using 24-items Luthans *et al.* (2007) PsyCap scale, consisting of four facets (Self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience). The reliability measures for each variable range from 0.82 to 0.87 (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Participants responded on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree. Sample items include “I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my work area”.

Work engagement

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) was employed to evaluate employees’ work engagement. The UWES scale consists of 9 items (e.g., “at my work I feel bursting with energy”). Each item is responded to by employing a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = never to 6 = Always. The scale is shown to have an excellent internal consistency of .90 (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006).

Control variables

We controlled for employee age, gender, and work experience. These socio-demographic variables have been found to influence EI and employee work engagement (see, Akhtar *et al.*, 2015; Luu, 2019; Miao *et al.*, 2016).

Results

Sample description

The socio-demographic result shows the sample description of the study has presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 shows the result of the respondents’ socio-demographic profiles. The result revealed that 47% of the respondents were males while 53% were females, indicating that majority of the respondents were male. Also, 66.5% of the respondents were married; 30.9% were single; 2.1% were divorced, while 0.6% were widow(er). This indicated that the majority of the respondents were married; 22.3% were between 21 – 30 years; 51.3% were between 31 – 40 years; 21.8% were between ages 41 – 50 years, and 4.5% were 50 years and above. This indicated that most of the respondents were between ages 31 – 40 years. In terms of educational qualification, .4% had OND/ NCE, 53.6% had BSc/BA/BEd/HND; 37.9% had MSc/MBA/MA; and 8.1% had other professional types of qualification, indicating that the majority of the respondents had at least a first degree. 21.8% had worked between 1 – 5 years, 45.6% had worked between 6 – 10 years, 15.2% had worked between 11 – 15 years, 10.8% had worked between 16 – 20 years, while 6.6% had worked for 21 years and above. This implies that most employees had worked for between 6 years and 15 years.

Preliminary analysis

Preliminary analyses were carried out to compute descriptive statistics, composite reliability, discriminant validity, convergent validity, bivariate correlations, and hierarchical regression analyses using SPSS 23 and AMOS 23. To determine whether POS and PsyCap mediated the relationship between EI and work engagement, serial mediation analyses were

performed employing Model 6 in the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017). While a bias-corrected bootstrapping method with a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) set at 5,000 reiterations was employed to test for the significant indirect effect.

Measurement model

First, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test whether the variables were empirically distinct. Several the established fit index needs to be obtained before a model is deemed acceptable. A model is deemed acceptable if the Root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) is $\leq .06$, Comparative fit index (CFI) $\geq .90$, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) $\geq .90$, and Standard root-mean-square residual (SRMR) $\leq .08$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Also, having three to four of the indices is sufficient evidence for the model fit (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The result revealed that our four-factor measurement model (EI, POS, PsyCap and work engagement) had a better fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.98$, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .92, TLI = .92, SMRS = .05). We compared to the indices of other alternative models. The three- factor model that combined work engagement and POS into one latent factor ($\chi^2/df = 3.32$, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .79, TLI = .77, SMRS = .08), while the two-factor model combined POS, work engagement and EI into one latent factor ($\chi^2/df = 5.95$, RMSEA = .10, CFI = .51, TLI = .49, SMRS = .11). We also calculated a fit statistic of a model that combined all four latent variables as a single latent factor. Comparing the fit statistic result of the single- factor model to the proposed model a poor fit was obtained ($\chi^2/df = 7.284$, RMSEA = 0.11, CFI = 0.38, TLI = .35, and SMRS = 0.12). This result further indicates that CMB does not have a significant threat in the data set.

Descriptive statistics

The means and standard deviations of the study variables shows that EI (mean = 3.411; SD = .382), PsyCap (mean = 4.689; SD = .616), POS (mean = 2.651; SD = .978),

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work engagement (mean = 4.471; SD = 1.084). In line with Field (2009), the relatively small SDs compared to the mean scores suggest that the calculated averages denote the observed data. The result of the skewness and kurtosis levels shows that the values of the variable were not greater than 10 (Kline, 2011).

From the measurement model, composite reliability, discriminant validity, convergent validity, bivariate correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

From Table 2, the composite reliability (CR) of the study variables is above the recommended threshold of 0.70, in line with Fornell and Larker (1981). The result of the convergent validity, which measures how the indicators of the latent construct correlate with each other, reveals that the AVE for all the latent constructs of the study is above 0.5. While the discriminant validity, which demonstrates how indicators of each latent variable are unique was valid, since the square roots of the AVE, as indicated by the diagonal value of each latent variable were all greater than the correlations of each variable. Thus, the composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity for the study were confirmed. The correlation result shows that POS was positively significantly related to work engagement ($r = .13, p < 0.01$), EI was also positively significantly related to work engagement ($r = .20, p < 0.01$), and PsyCap was positively correlated with work engagement ($r = .43, p < 0.01$). Based on the validity of the study instrument, we proceeded and analysed the study hypotheses.

Hypotheses Test

To test the hypothesized model, we conducted hierarchical linear regression analysis. Moreover, we followed the procedure by Taylor *et al.* (2008) to test for serial mediation. For

Hypothesis 1, we regressed EI on work engagement. To test Hypothesis 2 (indirect effect of EI on work engagement via PsyCap), we regressed work engagement on PsyCap, while controlling for EI. To test hypothesis 3 (indirect effect of EI on PsyCap through POS), we regress PsyCap on POS, while controlling for EI. Finally, to test hypothesis 4 (indirect effect of EI on work engagement via POS and PsyCap), we regressed work engagement on PsyCap while controlling for EI and POS. The proposed indirect effects for hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were examined by estimating bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) using bootstrap analysis (5000 bootstrap samples). The hypotheses results are shown in Table 3.

 Insert Table 3 about here

The result of hypothesis one revealed that EI significantly predicted work engagement ($B = .55$, $SE = .12$, $p < .01$). This supports the stated hypothesis, given that the unstandardized beta value of .55 is significant and $p < .01$. For hypothesis 2, the results of the bootstrapping analysis supported the proposed indirect effect that EI was indirectly and positively related to work engagement through PsyCap ($B = .68$; $p < .01$; 95% CI = [.4777, .9145]). The unstandardized beta value of .68 is significant ($p < .01$). The CI values of the lower limit confidence interval (.4777) and the upper limit confidence interval (.9145) does not contain zero, which according to Hayes (2013) shows the mediating effect of PsyCap in the relationship between EI and work engagement

The result of hypothesis 3 supported the proposed indirect effect of EI on PsyCap through POS ($B = .01$; $p < .01$; 95% CI = [.0002, .0368]). Also, based on the findings, the unstandardized beta value of .01 is significant ($p < .01$). The CI values of the lower limit confidence interval (.0002) and the upper limit confidence interval (.0368) does not contain zero, which according to Hayes (2013) shows the mediating effect of POS in the relationship

between EI and PsyCap. The result of hypothesis 4 revealed that the indirect effect of EI on work engagement was serially mediated by POS and PsyCap ($B = .01$; $p < .01$; 95% CI = [.0001, .0272]). Thus, confirming hypothesis 4. Also, based on the findings, the unstandardized beta value of .01 is significant ($p < .01$). The CI values of the lower limit confidence interval (.0001) and the upper limit confidence interval (.0272) do not contain zero, which according to Hayes (2013) shows that POS and PsyCap serially mediates the relationship between EI and work engagement.

Discussion

The study examined the link between EI and work engagement and extended previous studies by investigating the serial explanatory pathway of POS and PsyCap in this relationship. The study integrated CMR theory and COR theory to examine these relationships. We examined EI as a malleable ability. The findings of this study revealed a significant positive relationship between EI and work engagement, which is consistent with previous studies on trait EI and work engagement (Akhtar *et al.*, 2015; Barreiro and Treglown, 2020). In the model of Akhtar *et al.* (2015), personality traits including extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, as well as trait EI positively predicted work engagement, while neuroticism negatively predicted work engagement. Research on personality theories (e.g., Borghuis, et al., 2017) shows the stable nature of traits in individuals, implying that employee trait EI will largely remain the same. Our study approached EI as a skill, drawing on the CMR theory to highlight the cognitive and emotional aspects of EI that influences work engagement.

To extend previous research on EI and work engagement, we examined the indirect effects of PsyCap in this relationship. PsyCap indirectly mediated the positive effect of EI on work engagement. In other words, EI is associated with work engagement through PsyCap, which reveals that employees' high in EI are likely to be high in PsyCap and, in turn,

expected to have higher work engagement. This finding is in line with previous studies which demonstrated that PsyCap is positively related to work engagement (Alessandri *et al.*, 2018; Tsaor *et al.*, 2019) and plays a mediating role in work engagement studies (Tsaor *et al.*, 2019). Applying the COR theory, this study establishes the importance of personal resources which individuals draw from to influence their work engagement. In so doing, we highlight that PsyCap is a mediating pathway to explain the relationship between EI and work engagement.

Also, POS indirectly mediated the relationship between EI and PsyCap, implying that EI is related to PsyCap via POS. Consistent with the CMR theory, POS informs employees' cognition about a supportive work environment and is expected to trigger personal resources positively. Moreover, Kirrane *et al.*, (2017) opined that a supportive environment improves individuals' PsyCap. This finding indicates that POS as a contextual factor allows employees to flourish in their work roles (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2013) and aids their level of work engagement. The result of the serial mediation model revealed an indirect effect of POS and PsyCap in the link between EI and work engagement. The current study is the first to establish this serial explanatory pathway between EI and work engagement.

Theoretical Implications

We believe that our study contributes to the existing EI studies and the wider literature in four ways. First, our study contributes to the literature by expanding how ability EI influences work engagement, thereby strengthening our understanding that EI can be developed by employees by paying attention to their emotional, cognitive, relational, and motivational evaluations, in line with the CMR theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1991). Emotions are extracted from the evaluation of experiences that informs subsequent behaviour (Fredrickson, 2000). This point reflects EI as adaptable rather than fixed, thereby informing organisations on the need to train their employees on EI. Second, this study applied the CMR

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theory, integrating it with COR theory to explain how employees work engagement is influenced by EI and the mediating pathways of PsyCap and POS in these relationships, thereby strengthening our understanding of personal and contextual resources in enhancing organisational outcomes (Akhtar *et al.*, 2015; Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2013). Third, we contribute to the PsyCap literature by empirically establishing the mediating relationship of PsyCap in the EI-work engagement link, thereby highlighting the critical importance of PsyCap as a vital pathway to work engagement. Our study brings to light that the components of PsyCap including confidence, resilience, hope, and optimism can be developed for more effective work outcomes (Luthans, Luthans, and Luthans, 2004). Finally, we contribute to the literature by exploring the mediating role of POS in the EI-work engagement link, thereby deepening our understanding of the role of organisational support in enhancing employees' work engagement and building a high-performing work system. Prior research shows that individuals who perceive that their organisations are supportive of their work are likely to stay longer with the organisation (Bano et al., 2015). This reflects that POS stimulates work engagement. As such, we contribute to the PsyCap and wider literature by highlighting that organisations need to support their employees and be perceived as doing so.

Practical Implications

Valuable practical implications can be drawn from our study. First, the current study suggests that EI can be developed as a skill. Thus, organisations should invest in training and development programmes on EI. This will inform employees on the social intelligence of EI, how to appraise and regulate their emotions, that of others, and use the information to guide their thinking and action (Salovey and Meyer, 1990). Based on the findings of this study, EI training is likely to positively influence employee work and non-work outcomes. Second, organisations should provide more support to employees, for example, onboarding of new employees, mentoring scheme, social support, and strengthening of supervisor-subordinate

relationships as well as co-workers support. These support systems strengthen the perception of organisational support by employees, thereby increasing employees' engagement and reducing labour turnover. Third, managers need to pay attention to the PsyCap of employees as a vital resource to building an effective and sustainable work system. Employees with high PsyCap are assets to their organisations in how they deploy their capacities of resilience, hope, efficacy, and optimism. Recognising these and helping to build PsyCap in employees through employee-centered policies will increase the work engagement and performance indices of organisations. Last, based on the findings of this study, EI is a useful tool that organisations can leverage to maintain a healthy and thriving workforce. Line managers should encourage employees to demonstrate their EI in the workplace and building individual and team relationships with colleagues. Such understanding of peers' and others' emotions through organisational policies, thereby making the workplace healthier for employees to thrive.

Limitation and Future Research

Despite the contributions of this study, it is without limitations. First, data was obtained from a public sector organisation, hence, the generalisation of findings should be done with caution. Second, this study examined EI and work engagement as unidimensional constructs, thus, not limiting the engagement of the literature and theoretical lens in the sub-dimensions of variables. Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design, albeit, collecting data in piece-meal (three waves) to limit the effects of CMB. Last, the study is limited by using self-reported measures of variables. The use of self-report raises concerns for CMB. Though our study aligns with the argument of Conway and Lance (2010), that self-reports are suitable in certain situations, it limits the reliability of the instruments. To address these limitations, we suggest that future research should include multiple organisations and a representative sample. Future studies should employ the sub-dimensions of EI in the serial

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mediation process and its link with outcome variables. Besides, further studies should examine other personal and contextual resources that can affect employee EI–work engagement link using experimental and longitudinal designs. Last, future studies should employ a multi-source approach involving leaders and followers in the rating of study variables.

Conclusion

Our study explored the relationship between EI and work engagement. It further examined the mediating relationship of PsyCap and POS in the EI-work engagement link. Data was collected from a public sector organisation in Nigeria. The result of our study shows that EI was positively related to work engagement. EI exerted an indirect effect on PsyCap via POS, while the indirect effect of EI on work engagement was serially mediated by POS and PsyCap. The findings suggest that EI helps employees to enhance their work engagement. Our study contributes to the EI and wider literature by emphasizing the importance of emotional awareness, regulation, appraisal, and management in achieving work engagement. Our findings are relevant to the challenging work conditions in today’s workplace with high levels of uncertainty, and emergent changes in workplace practices. Employees should pay closer attention to their ability EI towards better self-regulation and organisations should be mindful of how the emotional appraisal and regulations of employees can influence work engagement and a flourishing workplace.

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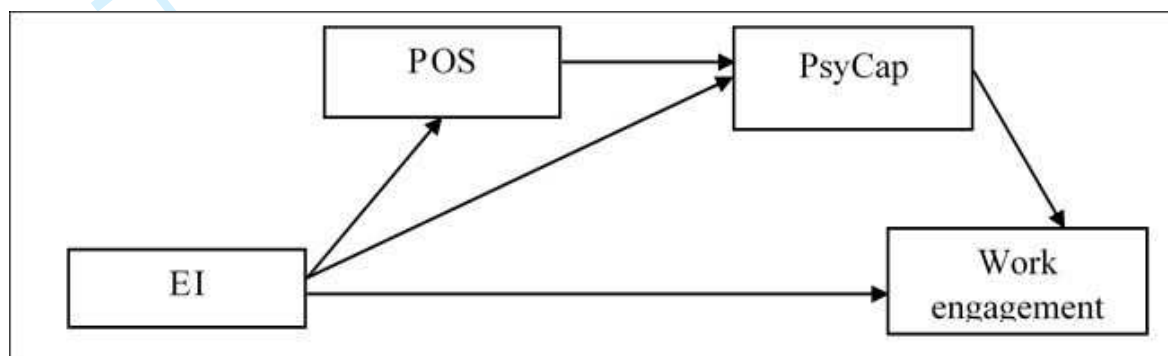
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Figure 1.*Hypothesised Serial Mediation Model.*

Notes: EI: Emotional Intelligence; POS: Perceived Organisational Support; PsyCap: Psychological Capital

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	248	47.0
Female	280	53.0
Total	528	100
Marital Status		
Married	351	66.5
Single	163	30.9
Divorced	11	2.1
Widow(er)	3	0.6
Total	528	100
Age-Range		
21 – 30 years	118	22.3
31 – 40 years	271	51.3
41 – 50 years	115	21.8
51 years & above	24	4.5
Total	528	100
Educational Qualification		
OND	2	.4
BSc./HND	283	53.6
MBA/ MSc	200	37.9
Others	43	8.1
Total	528	100
Work Experience		
1 – 5years	115	21.8
6 – 10years	241	45.6
11 - 15years	80	15.2
16 - 20years	57	10.8
21years and above	35	6.6
Total	528	100

Table 2.*Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extract, Maximum Shared Variance, and Correlations*

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Work engagement	0.89	0.54	0.14	0.74						
2. POS	0.85	0.58	0.02	0.13**	0.76					
3. Emotional intelligence	0.87	0.62	0.23	0.20**	0.08	0.79				
4. PsyCap	0.90	0.69	0.23	0.43**	0.16**	0.57**	0.83			
5. Age	-	-	-	.14**	-.07	.01	.02	-		
6. Gender	-	-	-	-.14**	-.08	.05	-.06	-.14**	-	
7. Work Experience	-	-	-	.19**	-.01	.08	.12**	.48**	-.13**	-

Notes: n=528. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; POS: Perceived organisational support; PsyCap: Psychological Capital; Value on the diagonal are square roots of the AVEs

Table 3.
Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, Direct and Indirect Effects

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Work engagement		Work engagement		Psychological capital		Work engagement	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	2.53***	.43	1.17***	.43	1.62***	.22	1.03***	.44
Age	.08	.07	.10	.06	-.02	.03	.11	.06
Gender	-.27**	.09	-.19*	.09	-.09*	.04	-.18*	.09
Work Experience	.13**	.05	.10*	.04	.04	.02	.09*	.04
EI	.55	.12	-.13	.13	.87***	.06	-.13	.13
R ²	.09**		.22***		.34**		.22***	
Direct Effect ^a			-.13	.13	.87***	.06	-.13	.13
Indirect Effect ^b			.68**	.11	.01**	.01	.01**	.01
CI of Indirect Effect			[.4777 , .9145]		[.0002 , .0368]		[.0001 , .0272]	

Notes: *n* =528. EI: Emotional intelligence; CI: confidence interval. ^a Direct effect of EI on work engagement and direct effect of EI on Psychological capital. ^bIndirect effect of EI on work engagement through Psychological capital (Model 2), EI on Psychological capital through Perceived organisational support (Model 3) and indirect effect of EI on work engagement through Perceived organisational support and Psychological capital (Model 4). **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001